

Shifting practices and shifting discourses: policy and small-scale agriculture in Canada

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Abstract

This article reviews the policy directives of national and provincial Departments of Agriculture in Canada and their uptake in practice on family farms in New Brunswick. Using Statistics Canada data, it explores the extent to which farmers' practices have mirrored the agricultural policy directives. It finds that agricultural policy favored industrial farm operations and processing companies and spurred concentration by creating ever larger farms. By documenting how policy discourses shift in tandem with farm practices, the article illustrates how agricultural policy development is a key driver in the structural transformation of agriculture. But this case study also shows that despite their exclusion from policy initiatives, small farms have stubbornly remained part of the New Brunswick's rural landscape.

Key words: agricultural development; agricultural policies; case studies; small farms; social change.

Subjects: territory, land use, agricultural and food production policy.

Résumé

Changement de pratiques et de discours : politiques agricoles et exploitations familiales au Canada

Cet article passe en revue les orientations stratégiques des ministères nationaux et provinciaux de l'Agriculture du Canada et la mise en œuvre de ces politiques pour les exploitations familiales au Nouveau-Brunswick. En utilisant les données statistiques du Canada, il examine dans quelle mesure les pratiques des agriculteurs sont en phase avec les objectifs de la politique agricole. Les politiques agricoles ont par le passé favorisé les activités industrielles, les entreprises de transformation et stimulé la concentration par la création d'exploitations de plus en plus grandes. En documentant les caractéristiques et les dynamiques conjointes des discours politiques et des pratiques agricoles, l'article illustre comment les politiques agricoles contribuent effectivement à transformer de façon structurelle l'agriculture. Mais l'article démontre également que, même si elles sont exclues des initiatives politiques, les petites exploitations perdurent dans le paysage rural du Nouveau-Brunswick.

Mots clés : changement social ; développement agricole ; étude de cas ; petite exploitation agricole ; politique agricole.

Thèmes : systèmes agraires ; territoire, foncier, politique agricole et alimentaire.

Census after census, the Canadian farm population is aging; the number of farms is declining, and the average farm size is increasing (Statistics Canada, 2007, 2012a). This paper argues that these ongoing structural transformations in Canadian agriculture are the outcomes of a very long and systematic policy agenda that has supported large-scale

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industrial farm businesses over small-scale family farms. But the transition has not been smooth and nor is it complete. Family farms, big and small, continue to operate within the Canadian agricultural landscape (Statistics Canada, 2007, 2014). This diversity is indicative of competing agricultural agendas and practices.

Bollman (2007) contends the three “fundamental drivers” of change in rural communities are commodity prices, technological advancements, and shifts in population demographics — especially rural outmigration. In contrast, Mattison and Norris (2005) argue that rural land use changes according to how markets, policy, technology and environmental factors (geographic and social) converge at different times and places. This paper follows Mattison and Norris (2005), in arguing that policy development must be taken into account when studying the transformation of agriculture. It does so on the basis of two points. First, none of the “drivers” identified can actually act in and of themselves. It is people who are acting within the parameters of their localities and markets and making choices about what to do based on current commodity prices, available technologies, employment opportunities, and service amenities. Demographics change when people decide to move from one locale to another. Markets and prices change when people switch the menu on their plates, or when producers look for new opportunities. Secondly, the essential goal of policy is to change behavior (Lightman, 2003). Policy is a blueprint of what should be done in order to create desired outcomes. In the case of agriculture, what policy agenda was promoted and to what extent did stakeholders embrace it “on the ground” through their day-to-day activities and practices?

This fundamental question is addressed through a case study of policy developments and farming practices in New Brunswick, Canada. The paper begins with an overarching presentation of the discourses embedded in national and provincial agricultural policy documents. It then uses aggregate data from Statistics Canada to document shifts in rural farm household practices. As the section *Evidence of shifting agricultural*

practices in Canada reveals, not all family farms in New Brunswick have embraced the dominant policy discourse. The paper’s concluding discussion situates this resistance within larger questions and debates about small-scale agriculture.

Shifting agricultural policy discourses in Canada

Policy implies choices. Each time a choice is made to follow one direction, another is effectively abandoned. Reconciling competing interests within a given policy framework is difficult (Lightman, 2003). In Canada, agricultural policy development is particularly challenging: first, because of the geographic size and diversity of farm sectors throughout the country; and second, because agriculture is a joint federal-provincial-territorial responsibility (Skogstad, 2008). Consequently agricultural policy development occurs at two government levels: national and provincial (territorial). While Canada’s ten provinces and three territories work with federal agendas and regulations, they have the capacity to adapt and move policies in different directions if doing so allows them to address local issues and meet the needs of dominant interests. This section briefly reviews the vision of agriculture in national and provincial policies over the past 40 years.

National agricultural policy development

In the post-World War II era, Canadian agricultural practices have been guided by an extensive number of policies. Skogstad’s (2008) detailed policy review concludes that national policy has followed three distinct paths. It has taken a *state assistance* approach to improve farm incomes and the overall economic wellbeing of farm households. More recently it has adopted a *trade liberalization* model seeking to make Canadian agriculture conform to neo-liberal global marketplace goals. And for a short time between these two dominant policy agendas, national policy endorsed the

European *multifunctionality* framework for rationalizing investment in particular income stability programs. To some extent all three policy trajectories have been preoccupied with improving family farm incomes because, regardless of their physical size or farm cash receipts, family farm households have been increasingly reliant on off-farm incomes (Bessant, 2006; Frigon, 2007). Since the 1970s, farms have routinely been caught in cost-price squeezes where farm gate prices are substantially lower than farm input costs. To stay afloat and keep farming, farmers have habitually borrowed money for everyday operating expenses, resulting in massive collective debt. At the end of 2010 Canadian farmers owed over \$63 billion dollars (\$1 = €0.75) to lending institutions (Biggs *et al.*, 2011). Financial troubles — often the upshot of grand expansion schemes — have led to the closure of many family farm operations (Bessant, 2006; Frigon, 2007).

While state assistance, multifunctionality, and market liberalization are all policy directives pursued to address the farm financial crisis, the three are not entirely compatible. Each reflects a different ideological framework embedded in the larger socioeconomic, cultural and political debates at the time of their adoption. The 1950s and 60s saw the growth of the welfare state in Canada, where many social programs were designed to cast a wide social safety net and improve the social wage. By the 1970s Keynesian economics was starting to lose favor and the government’s willingness to support family farms through direct assistance waned. During this period the goal of policy was to “*rationalize, consolidate and expand production volumes above all else*” (Winson, 1988). The need for family farms to become profitable businesses, rather than “lifestyles” or sources of livelihood, was being strongly promoted in the late 1960s vision for agriculture (Canada, 1969). In the 1980s farms that were not turning into profitable businesses were perceived as *failures* (Winson, 1988). These “failure” farms were hindering the expansionist goals of business oriented farmers who needed land to increase production capacity. To support the growth and development model, farm credit programs were developed, along with management

and training programs and scientific research programs focused on increasing yields. By the 1990s, this agenda was further embraced through a *laissez-faire* market liberalization strategy, which promoted the internationalization of Canadian agriculture (Kittson, 2011) and effectively prioritized corporate agricultural interests. What has followed is a debate over whether the purpose of the food system is to “grow dollars” or “grow food”.

The tension within Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC) policy stems from trying to address two divergent goals: on one hand, promote policy that supports competitive, free market economic policy objectives; and on the other, promote social policy dimensions aimed at improving the social wellbeing of farm households. In recent years the solution has been to reconcile the two agendas by turning income stability, financial security, and economic wellbeing into a “sustainability” issue (AAFC, 2011). The principal dimension of farm “sustainability” that is judged is profitability. Farms not filled with “individual players” who have the “knowledge, skills and tools” to ensure business acumen, innovation, risk management and entrepreneurialism are judged “unsustainable” (AAFC, 2011).

Profitability across farm sectors and at the farm level is supposed to be achieved through enhanced markets, strategic positioning and investment in research and innovation. Engaging these policy initiatives is critical from a neoliberal perspective: *“The competitiveness of the agriculture and agri-food sector depends on its ability to remain profitable and viable over the long term”* (Kittson and Smith, 2013). As this policy framework has emerged, the discourse surrounding farming has shifted. Current policy documents make little or no reference to farmers and farm families. Instead they refer to competitors, entrepreneurs, individual players, trading partners, the agri-food sector, the industry or consumers. This prevailing market language clearly indicates for whom the policies are written. Skogstad (2008) argues that the objective of aligning Canadian farming practices with international trade regulations has led to a major paradigm shift within AAFC. She concludes that agriculture is being internationalized

via free trade agreements and market liberalization, which effectively favor foreign investors rather than domestic producers (Skogstad, 2008).

Provincial agricultural policy development

In Europe, due to the two-tiered process between policy development and implementation, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) can be massaged to meet the particular needs of member states (Labarthe and Laurent, 2013). Similarly in Canada, national policy directives can be taken up at the provincial and territorial level in different ways. New Brunswick, like other Canadian provinces, has the capacity to advance national agricultural mandates and programs in ways that best serve their particular circumstances (Skogstad, 2008).

Though a small province, New Brunswick has been selected to examine the interplay between national and provincial levels of policy and practice because it remains one of Canada’s most rural populations and is the birthplace of McCain Foods International (Stoffman, 2007). Located on the East Coast of Canada, with a landmass of 71,400 square kilometers, New Brunswick, in 2011, had a population of 751,000 (Statistics Canada, 2012a). Economically the province continues to be highly dependent on natural resource industries, including farming, so it is an ideal site to study the relations between shifting policy aims and their impact on local food systems and farm practices.

Until World War II, farming was an integral part of rural New Brunswick. In the mid-1950s family owned and operated farms provided employment to 29.1% of the province’s total population. But by 1971 — essentially one generation later — only 4.3% of the population continued to farm (Statistics Canada, 1997). The rapid losses in farm population and census farms prompted the New Brunswick government of the time to conduct a three-year *Agricultural Resources Study* (ARS) to investigate how provincial resources could best be mobilized to *“maximize farm income, to strengthen the vitality of the family farm, to encourage new job creation in food processing industries and*

to increase food production” (New Brunswick, 1977).

Coming on the heels of the 1969 Canadian Agricultural Task Force report, the ARS documented the province’s interest in sustaining family farms while promoting the growth of food processing industries. Food processors were and are dependent on ever increasing amounts of raw material at ever-lower prices to sustain their growth and profits (Winson, 1985). To meet the needs of food processors, the state encouraged farms to expand, mechanize and modernize into “cost-effective commercial operations”. During this period, prosperous farms provided a “reasonable return on investment” and stood in sharp contrast to family farms providing only a livelihood (New Brunswick, 1974, 1977, 2010). The vision of farming as a profit-oriented business is clearly advanced in early policy documents: *“It is urgently necessary to provide an economic climate in which farmers can expand their operations (...). The thrust of the policies of the Department of Agriculture, particularly in meeting market needs must be with aiding the commercial farmer and the efficient producer, and in adding to the numbers of such operators. The future of agriculture must be oriented towards...larger farm-units not only for increased production efficiency, but also to structure units that are large enough to afford better management”* (New Brunswick, 1974).

In short, the policy imperative at the provincial level emulated the federal one: to eliminate small, economically “inefficient” operations (even if they provided livelihoods and food security to many rural families) in favor of “business-oriented” farms.

While supporting profit-oriented, productivist agriculture became the mandate of the province throughout the 1970s, successive provincial governments supported this agenda through a systematic shift in the kinds of programs they funded and how they referred to the farm community. For example, by 1998 the New Brunswick government no longer made any mention of *farmers, farm businesses, or family farms* in their mission statement, mandates or objectives. Instead their goal was: *“To increase the level of economic activity in the agri-food industry and promote*

entrepreneurship and economic growth in New Brunswick (New Brunswick, 1998).

Among their defining principles they intended to:

- provide clients with the appropriate tools for growth, development and increased self-reliance, such as information systems, access to capital, risk management, training, technology, and technical expertise;
- maximize returns from the market;
- create a healthy “entrepreneurial environment” through the reduction of unnecessary regulations and other barriers to development (New Brunswick, 1998).

Under market liberalization policies, farmers officially became “entrepreneurs” and “clients” who must maximize their profits to be deemed successful. Betty Brown, a New Brunswick farm woman activist, reports that this is when the government stopped inviting farm women and small farmers to meetings: “*Before 1998 we were asked to go to meetings, to go to Ottawa, we were asked our opinion but that slowed down really fast*” (Comments from the farm community are from public events, conferences and interviews undertaken through a participatory action research model). This policy language indicates why: the government re-identified who their stakeholders were and shifted their priorities. Small and medium-sized farms were no longer their constituents.

Evidence of shifting agricultural practices in Canada

To be effective policy must be “taken up” by those it is meant to guide. What

then were the impacts of these shifting discourses on farm practices? This section explores the extent to which the policy vision of “bigger”, more productive, farms began to take hold at both the national and provincial levels through an examination of Statistics Canada data on farm size.

Changing policies, changing practices: the structural transformation of Canadian agriculture

Rural sociologists and agricultural economists throughout the 1970s and 80s documented the structural transformation of Canadian agriculture (Ehrensaft and Bollman, 1985; Ghorayshi, 1986; Goddard *et al.*, 1993; Statistics Canada, 1997). Their work captured how farm size and production capacity were expanding, farm numbers contracting, and farm capitalization, mechanization and technological innovation transforming the rural landscape. *Table 1* illustrates how Canadian farm numbers steadily declined while average farm size continued to expand. Of course these aggregate changes were partly due to agricultural science, farm specialization, chemical fertilizers and other inputs. But they also demonstrate that the policy vision, was indeed being enacted, along with the programs it spawned.

These structural changes occurred precisely because farm families changed their practices. They did so because the policy agenda and the incentive programs emerging from it were designed to garner these effects. Statistical data simply reflects what people are doing: practices must change for the system to change. In studying structural level changes, some researchers emphasized the

aggregate data trends while others investigated the day-to-day decision-making and *modus operandi* of family farm households. What emerged from this second research agenda was a rich analysis of life and work on the farm: an understanding of how family farm households juggled family and farm life, how they coped with economically challenging circumstances, and their ongoing motivations for farming (Friedmann, 1980; Ghorayshi, 1986; Statistics Canada, 1997). This research captured the competing strategies families used to retain their farm units. It was cognizant of how policies and programs produced winners and losers: some farmers were riding the wave while others, due to debt burdens (from growing too fast), were entirely out of the game.

Changing policies, changing practices: the New Brunswick case

Table 2 illustrates that fewer but “bigger” farms were also becoming *de rigueur* in rural New Brunswick. Farm number shrinkage occurred in tandem with farm size increases because arable land is finite. Situated in the midst of this changing agricultural scene was McCain Foods Ltd. Over the intervening years it grew from a small local company into a multinational with operations on all continents (Stoffman, 2007). In the long run McCain Food fared much better than the local farms growing potatoes under their contracts (Senopi, 1980; Murphy, 1982; Winson, 1985). McCain expanded by taking advantage of government programs and grants aimed at assisting the growth of the processing industry (New Brunswick, 1977; Senopi, 1980; Stewart, 1974; Murphy, 1982). They

Table 1. Canada, number and area of farms.

Tableau 1. Canada, nombre et superficie des exploitations agricoles (1 acre = 0.4 ha).

	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006	2011
Total number of farms	574,993	430,503	338,552	293,089	276,548	229,373	205,730
Average area in acres per farm reporting	302	404	499	572	608	728	778

(Statistics Canada, 2007, 2012a)

Table 2. New Brunswick farm numbers, average farm size and potato production.

Tableau 2. Nombre d'exploitations agricoles au Nouveau-Brunswick, taille moyenne des exploitations et production de pommes de terre (1 acre = 0.4 ha).

	1956	1966	1971	1976	1986	1996	2006	2011*
Number of farms	22,116	8,706	5,485	4,551	3,554	3,405	2,776	2,611
Average area in acres per farm reporting	135	208	244	253	284	280	352	359
Total Number of Potato Farms	14,953	5,471	1,212	997	547	439	341	194
Acres in potatoes	46,190	64,901	59,421	55,521	48,466	54,064	59,870	51,814
Average area in acres per farm reporting	3	12	49	56	89	123	176	267

(Statistics Canada, 2007, 2012a, *2012b and AAFC, 2014)

successfully built an impressive global empire through vertical and horizontal integration. Senopi's (1980) description of this process is the most widely quoted text highlighting how McCain's retained control and profits within their larger corporate entity: *"Potatoes are grown on McCain land (Valley Farms Ltd) enriched by McCain fertilizer (McCain Fertilizers Ltd) using McCain seed (Foreston Seed Co. Ltd). Harvesting is done with McCain machinery (Thomas Equipment Ltd) and the harvested potatoes are either stored in McCain facilities (Carleton Cold Storage Co. Ltd), sent to McCain's plant for processing (McCain Foods Ltd) or sold fresh. In the latter case, the potatoes are handled by McCain shippers (McCain Produce Co. Ltd) which use McCain trucks (Day and Ross Ltd) to move them to McCain storage facilities (Bayside Potato Port Ltd) at the point of shipping. The processed potatoes can similarly be moved in McCain trucks (M. & D. Transfer Ltd) for shipment abroad where one of McCain's sales distribution systems (McCain International Ltd) handles the marketing."*

At the farm level McCain Foods implemented "potato agreements" whereby farmers took most of the risks and grew the "raw" processing inputs to McCain specifications. The contract stated when the crop was to be planted, cultivated and harvested. It established how the crop was to be maintained, what pesticides would be applied and when. And it heavily

penalized farmers who did not meet the standards while awarding bonuses to those who exceeded them (Stewart, 1974).

Given how much control McCain Foods Ltd. had in the local market, it is noteworthy that between 1966 and 1971 — major expansion years for the McCain empire — the average potato acreage grew fourfold (table 2), while the number of farms growing potatoes shrank dramatically. Ironically, one of the cofounders of McCain Foods Ltd., Harrison McCain argued that he and his partners did not want farmers to fail: *"If farmers go broke, McCain goes broke — and vice versa. We don't want them to go broke"* (Branch, 1983). Yet clearly they were going broke. Structural changes in farm numbers document this fact. But farm expansion and specialization meant the sector was able to sustain acreage and yields with a fraction of the number of farms. This pattern of sustained capacity with fewer farms has continued (AAFC, 2014). For example, the potato acreage for 1961 and 1996 were virtually identical — 54,165 acres versus 54,064 acres — but in 1996 there was a mere 5.3% of the farms present in 1961 (Statistics Canada, 2007). The 2011 figures suggest another precipitous drop in potato farms, but how large this drop is remains debatable because current accounts from AAFC (2014) and Statistics Canada (2012b) of historical figures do not match those embedded in earlier Statistics Canada (2007)

documents. Most likely industry and government are retroactively recalibrating historical data to emphasize farms meeting a certain revenue class. This is in keeping with their policy agenda.

Likewise the potato industry routinely argues New Brunswick is well suited to growing potatoes (AAFC, 2014), when it is probably more accurate to say the political climate has been well suited for McCain Foods and their agenda of processing potatoes. True, before the entry of McCain's processing facilities, potatoes were grown throughout the province. But over the past forty years, production has become increasingly concentrated in the three counties — Victoria, Madawaska and Carleton — that surround the two processing plants (Murphy, 1982). Historically over forty varieties of potatoes were grown in New Brunswick; this quickly dwindled to four dominant varieties based on what McCain wanted for making the best French fries (Murphy, 1982). Russet Burbank is the variety that makes the most pleasing French fry, but it takes 10-14 days more to mature than the typical New Brunswick growing season. Murphy (1982) argued the variety of potatoes grown in New Brunswick followed the needs of the processor rather than those of the farmers. For McCain Foods to grow and expand their operations within the province they needed a reliable and steady supply of cheap inputs (Senopi, 1980; Stewart, 1974). Fewer, bigger, more

dependent potato operators presented the ideal scenario for meeting McCain's growing production needs (Senopi, 1980; Murphy, 1982). It also supported the agricultural policy vision. Agricultural policy development worked in unison with the processing corporation's interests.

An alternative agenda evident in the New Brunswick data

Clearly the government's policy mission was being accomplished. Farms were growing in scale and efficiency. But in reality a much more varied, complex, and messy farm landscape persisted. Small- and medium-scale farms continued to exist and grow food adjacent to expanding operations. This bifurcated, or what Bojnec and Latruffe (2013) call Europe's bipolar farming structure, is recognized in Canadian government policy documents: "*Canadian farms differ by size, scale, farm type and typology, while farm operators differ in their management skills and business strategies. Differences in performance between farms can be explained by this diversity. Some farm families rely more on off-farm income to help them manage uncertainty due to production and marketing risk, and others diversify production*" (Kittson, 2011). Interestingly such diversity is seldom framed as a form of resistance to the dominant policy agenda. Yet small and medium-sized farmers do perceive themselves as engaged in

a different agenda than the policy adherents. They self-identify as farmers engaged in sustainable agriculture (Machum, 2005). The counter dialogue of larger operators is "you must be a business first". Each group places themselves in sharp contrast to the other. Each sees their agenda as meaningful and enduring, and the other as misguided. Witnessing similar discord decades earlier, Cochrane (1958) argued those who did not lead (early adopters) or eventually follow the tides of change (average farmers) were "laggards". It could be argued the "laggards" are simply making different business choices. They recognize value in small-scale agriculture and its contributions to local markets, cultural heritage and ecological sustainability.

As *table 3* captures, New Brunswick agriculture is filled with "laggards". In 1981 extremely small — what Statistics Canada has started to call "micro" farms (Esqueda, 2012) but were at the time referred to as "hobby" or "lifestyle" — farms accounted for almost one-quarter of New Brunswick's farming operations. By 2001 farms with less than \$2,500 in gross farm receipts were earning four times less than the amount of income deemed necessary for a minimal standard of living. This led policy makers to surmise farming was a marginal activity for this group. In 2006 Statistics Canada decided to amalgamate the lowest three receipt classes to an "under \$10,000" category because farms in these categories had such low sales they couldn't be providing viable livelihoods (New

Brunswick, 2010). This new definition of "very small" meant in 2006 over one-third or 991 of New Brunswick's 2,776 farms — *i.e.* more farms than in 1981 — were now designated as "marginal" (New Brunswick, 2010). The prevalence of "very small" farms in New Brunswick — and other parts of Canada (Esqueda, 2012) — is evidence that significant numbers did not embrace the policy agenda. Yet Statistics Canada routinely omits farms with less than \$10,000 in revenue from their analytic calculations (Statistics Canada, 2012b). By ignoring their existence the government has effectively written off farms that resist the policy imperative to "get big or get out".

Conclusion

What is unfolding in New Brunswick is not unique. At the national and international level there is a struggle going on over farm practices and future food systems (Desmarais *et al.*, 2010). On one hand, organizations like *Via Campesina* and *Community Supported Agriculture* are promoting small-scale food production geared to local needs and markets; on the other, corporate agriculture continues to promote large-scale industrial farming for export markets. Despite evidence that alternative farming models are beneficial both ecologically and socially, dominant agricultural policies continue to sideline them (Latruffe and Mann, 2015). These competing agricultural visions, and the farming practices they implicitly and explicitly endorse, have their roots in fundamentally different policy visions of *best practices*.

At a global level the policy agenda has been to expand production with larger and larger, more efficient farms. Yet even throughout Europe small and medium-size farms continue to dot the rural countryside. Castro *et al.* (2014) note farm size reflects past cultural practices so "*the presence of small farms is more concentrated in Mediterranean Europe and in some countries of Eastern Europe*". Regional variation is also evident in Canada. Esqueda (2012) argues small farms in the Maritimes, which includes New Brunswick, are more likely to succeed

Table 3. Persistence of small farms in New Brunswick.

Tableau 3. Persistance de petites exploitations au Nouveau-Brunswick.

	Census farms	Farms with total gross receipts over \$2,500*	Micro census farms with receipts under \$2,500	Micro farms as % of total farms
1981	4,063	3,112	951	23.4
1986	3,553	2,993	620	17.4
1991	3,252	2,706	546	16.8
1996	3,405	2,783	622	18.3
2001	3,034	2,563	471	15.5

(Statistics Canada, 2003). *All figures in constant 2001 CDN dollars.

than those in central Canada — in part because of the cultural role they play in rural communities. But such farms fare best in Quebec which has an incredibly “strong food culture.” Clearly the cultural as well as the political processes farming practices are embedded in matter.

The United Nations decision to name 2014 International Year of Family Farming refocused academic attention onto small-scale agriculture. Within the expanded European Union (EU 27), 81.1% of agricultural holdings fall within the small farm category (Labarthe and Laurent, 2013), and here too “small farms have progressively vanished from the policy agenda” (Labarthe and Laurent, 2013). Castro *et al.* (2014) perceive them as gaining ground in current CAP programs because they “act as social buffers” during challenging economic times. Mann (2014) offers a different interpretation arguing small-scale agriculture is a “luxury item”, delivering luxury goods (*i.e.* local, unique rather than mass-produced foodstuffs) and it persists for nostalgic reasons. It is ironic that farms that have hitherto been disregarded and marginalized by policymakers, researchers and consumers are now suddenly being reframed as occupying a niche market when little to nothing has changed in terms of their actual day-to-day practices.

What is evident here is that as policy changed so too did farm practices — but the take-up was always incomplete because some refused to follow. Focusing our analytic spotlight on the sheer percentage of farms that remain “small” in terms of physical and revenue size in New Brunswick and Canada raises questions about the true effectiveness of the past forty years of policy development. Policy without uptake is ineffective; and practices that persist completely outside policy frameworks are generally marginalized. It is here on the margins that New Brunswick’s small and medium-sized farms have tenaciously held on, weathering storm after storm, maintaining their livelihoods and protecting farmland from other developments.

This paper has been arguing that it is critical to study both who prevails in agricultural policy and the actual rural landscape that emerges. Emphasizing structural change, and the growing

share of the food market a relatively small group of farmers and processors like McCain Foods Ltd. occupies, frames big farms as the success story. It does so at the expense of a statistically significant group of small-scale farmers who have opted to resist policy directives. Agricultural policy has systematically aimed to increase production with the fewest number of farms, but throughout Canada and Europe small farmers have sought to retain their livelihoods. Decades ago these small farms were the status quo. Now they are emerging as key players in local food movement activities. What arises in the future depends upon the programs, policies and trade agreements implemented at local, national and international levels and the place small-scale agriculture is awarded in those policies. ■

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